Believability factor in Malayalam Reality Shows: A Study among the Television Viewers of Kerala

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Abstract: *Reality programming is a highly visible element of popular culture and plays an influential role in today's television programming. No longer has an off-season summer trend, reality shows become a leading prime-time program staple, often dominating the ratings in numerous coveted time slots. Reality shows are supposed to be created mainly directing for the youth. The international scenario supports the concept. But in Kerala, the recent TRPs reveals the fact that the youth oriented reality shows are mainly focusing the family folk. And there is where the problem arises. The purpose of this study was to explore youths' attitude towards the reality shows, especially to know how they perceive the believability factor behind reality shows in Malayalam.*
Keywords: *Reality shows, Malayalam television, TRPs, popular culture, believability factor.*

I.   Introduction

In the decades when television was a new medium, viewing it was an event and an experience in itself. But now television viewers are very familiar with the medium, and television is available twenty-four hours a day. Individuals now have more viewing choices than ever before in deciding how to spend their time with television. With the explosion of cable programming channels, many different genres of programming are competing for audiences. One programming type that has rapidly gained popularity across all TV channels in recent years is reality television programming. **Reality shows**, defined as television programs in which common people, without the help of a script, are placed in a specific human situation and their reactions and behavior filmed, are becoming tremendously popular throughout the world. In the United States, Kim Campbell, a reporter with the Christian Science Monitor, counts at least ten popular reality shows on American television. On British television, Sam Brenton, author of "Everyone's A Winner," reports that there are currently at least five extremely popular reality shows. In the Arab World, there are two twenty-four hour, seven days a week ones, which keep viewers glued to their televisions for hours. In light of the international popularity of these shows, it is clear that the popularity of reality is based on the fact that they reveal the universal aspects of human nature itself.

I.1 Reality Shows- The Concept

Reality shows are a popular genre of television viewing which shows participants in situations that test their nerves, intelligence, emotions and sometimes, even integrity. These responses are all caught on camera and are therefore totally natural. Reality shows stand apart from other television shows because the responses are supposedly unscripted and unmaneuvered. Their higher than average TRPs could be because Reality Shows thrive on naked human emotions, and play to an audience that thrives on voyeurism and hedonism. In many ways, Reality Shows demonstrate the ugly reality of what people actually want to do in their spare time.

I.2 Viewers and Reality Shows

Nowadays, all categories of viewers prefer to watch and enjoy reality TV shows. Different viewers have different reasons why they do so, and there lies the underlying effects of watching such. Watching these shows has effects on the viewers and the society in general. It may be positive to some audiences, but it also affects negatively to many, depending on how one views and takes the essence of the show. Viewers of reality shows who are addicted to these daily programs often get deeply involved into any situation. Often, certain reality television shows are based on topics that have no thought process or concepts. The audience thus gets hooked on to TV shows, which do not really have any intelligent concept

1.3 Reality behind Reality Shows

Reality shows seem to be the new age entertainment recipe. They might be selling controversies or cashing upon peoples emotion; but at the end of the day, they are the most popular shows with the highest TRPs. The TV reality shows of today seems to draw one far away from reality. They are merely means of exploitation of the common people; one of the attractions of reality television is the supposed "reality" of it - unscripted and

unplanned situations and reactions. One of the ethical problems of reality television is the fact that it isn't nearly as "real" as it pretends to be. At least in dramatic shows one can expect the audience to understand that what they see on the screen doesn't necessarily reflect the reality of the actors' lives; the same, however, cannot be said for heavily edited and contrived scenes on sees on reality shows

1.4 **Malayalam scenario**

With corporates queuing up as big-time sponsors, reality shows have displaced weepy soap operas as the prime time obsession in TV channels across Kerala. In Kerala, channels are competing each other to surpass viewer ship by offering big prizes. Flats, Cars, and many other prizes are awaiting the potential winners. Sensing a potential gold mine in ad revenue from reality shows, which are notching up high TRP's, Malayalam TV channels are increasingly plumping for such programmes `

II. Review of Literature

In 2000, James Wiltz and Steven Reiss, Ohio university, in a study 'Why People Watch Reality TV' assessed the appeal of reality TV by asking 239 adults to rate themselves on each of 16 basic motives using the Reiss Profile standardized instrument and to rate how much they watched and enjoyed various reality television shows. The results suggested that the people who watched reality television had above-average trait motivation to feel self-important and, to a lesser extent, vindicated, friendly, free of morality, secure, and romantic, as compared with large normative samples. The results, which were dose-dependent, showed a new method for studying media. This method is based on evidence that people have the potential to experience 16 different joys. People prefer television shows that stimulate the feelings they intrinsically value the most, which depends on individuality.

Barton and Raney (2002) through their study "Reality television programming and diverging gratifications: the influence of content on gratifications obtained "employed disposition theory to examine viewer enjoyment. This study examined the questions to gain a better understanding the appeal of this programming has for viewers. An exploration of the uses and gratifications of competition-based reality programming was used to determine what satisfaction viewers get from these shows and their motivations for watching

The study titled 'But this Time you choose' conducted by Su Holmes, in 2004, argues that the arrival of reality television has increased the concept of interactivity, and the technique works is to exploit the advantage of interactivity of Television in order to attract the viewers and to achieve high rating. The study also examines the shift for existing approaches to audience text relation in Television and cultural studies. He points out some of the phrases like 'But this time you choose', 'you decide', proliferate in contemporary television articulating a rhetoric that insists pressingly upon a new participatory relationship between viewers and screen.

In 2005, Annette Hill in her study on 'Reality TV: audience and popular factual television', observes that the process of programme categorization is fundamental to the every day practices of television viewing. It seems that audiences are not yet in a position to accept the ontological claims of reality television without reference to its generic status, but instead watch popular factual television with a critical eye, judging the degree of factuality in each reality format based on their experience of other types of factual programming as whole.

III. Research Questions

1. How do the educated youth of Kerala perceive the situations portrayed in reality shows?
2. What predicts satisfaction among youth of Kerala with viewing reality shows?
3. What rationale the youth of Kerala provide for watching reality shows?

IV. Methodology

A survey method was employed to collect and analyse the details about the problem under study. The method was finalized for this study considering the objectives and nature of the research work. The demographic variables identified in the study were sex, age, and educational qualification. Age was categorized into below 25 and 25 and above. Educational qualification were categorized as PhD,PG and Degree

V. Sampling Procedure

The usual procedure is to take a sample from the population. Researcher employed a convenience sampling for this research. Data was collected by means of self-administered questionnaire which carried questions based on the purpose of the study. Altogether there were 25 questions. Of these three were open-ended questions which were asked to get demographic variable of the sample. Based on the age groups below 25 and 25 and above, 150 questionnaires were distributed, out of which the researcher got back 115 responses. 100 questionnaires were taken for the study eliminating the unwanted ones. The data collected were tabulated using Microsoft Excel sheets and was subjected to Chi-square test analysis

VI. Results

The total sample size for the study was set at 150. Out of the 150 questionnaires 115 were filled and returned. Out of these 100 appropriate questionnaires were taken up for the analysis as the rest were incomplete.

VI.1 Demograhic data

Table 1: Education wise categorisation

Education	Number	Percentage (%)
PhD	31	31.00
PG	47	47.00
Degree	22	22.00
Total	100	100.00

The variable education was categorized into three groups. The group 'PhD' contributed 31% of the sample and the group ''Post graduate'' constituted 47 % of the sample and the group 'degree' contributed 22% of the sample

Table 2: Age wise categorisation

Age	Number	Percentage (%)
25 and above	42	42.00
Below 25	58	58.00
Total	100	100.00

The sample consisted of two age categories. Those in age group of '25 and above' years constituted 42%. While those falling in   the age group of 'below 25' constituted majority of 58%

Table 3: Gender wise categorisation

Gender	Number	Percentage (%)
Female	46	46.00
Male	54	54.00
Other	00	00
Total	100	100.00

Among the 100 respondents 46 % were females and 54% males
The questionnaire also carried queries to decipher educational qualification of the sample population. The levels were divided into three separate groups that are PG, PhD and Degree.

.VI.2 Reality show viewing nature of respondents

Table 4: Reality show viewing

Viewing	Number	Percentage (%)
Regularly	**7**	**7.00**
1-2 days a week	**33**	**33.00**
2-3 days a week	**10**	**10.00**
3-4 days a week	**1**	**1.00**
Never	**49**	**49.00**
Total	**100**	**100.00**

Among the 100 respondents, 7% watch reality show daily, 33% watch1-2 days in a week, 10% watch 2-3 days in a week, 1% watch 3-4 days in a week, while 49%   were not watching reality shows

VI.3 Reality show viewing and educational qualification

Table 5: Reality show viewing and educational qualification

Education	Regularly	1-2 days	2-3days	3-4days	never	Totals
PhD	0.00	32.26	0.00	0.00	67.74	100.00
PG	4.26	34.04	12.77	0.00	48.94	100.00
degree	22.73	31.82	18.18	4.55	22.73	100.00
All Grps	7.00	33.00	10.00	1.00	49.00	100.00
Pearson Chi-square: 24.2787, df=8, p=.002063						

Here chi-square test was applied for analyzing the reality show viewing on the basis of educational qualification. The 'p' value shows there exists significant relation between these variables. As the 'p' value is less than .05, it is clear that there is a significant relation between the variable educational qualification and reality show viewing

Table 6: Satisfaction level of the respondents

	Satisfied	Not satisfied	Total
PhD	0.00	100.00	100.00
PG	4.26	95.74	100.00
degree	27.27	72.73	100.00
All Grps	8.08	91.92	100.00
Pearson Chi-square: 14.4727, df=2, p=.000721			

Here, Chi-square test was applied for analyzing the satisfaction level of the viewers on the basis of educational qualification. The 'p' value shows there exists significant relation between the variables educational qualification and satisfaction.

VI.4 Believability towards 'reality' behind reality shows

Table 7: Visual representations of the stories of The Hindu

Q19	Believe	Certain extent	Not at all	Total
PhD	0.00	0.00	100.00	100.00
PG	0.00	12.77	87.23	100.00
degree	4.55	54.55	40.91	100.00
Total	1.00	18.00	81.00	100.00
Pearson Chi-square: 32.1370, df=4, p=.000002				

Here, Chi-square test was applied for analyzing the believability of viewers in the 'reality' behind reality shows on the basis of educational qualification. The 'p' value shows there exists significant relation between these variables. Only 1% 0f the total respondents believe in the reality of reality shows, 18% believe to some extent and a majority of 81% did not believe.

VI.5 Attitude towards reality shows

Here chi-square test was applied for analyzing the attitude of respondents towards the reality shows. The p value shows there exists highly significant relation between these variables.

Table 8: Attitude towards reality shows

	Encouraged	Boycotted	Total
PhD	0.00	100.00	100.00
PG	23.40	76.60	100.00
Degree	77.27	22.73	100.00
All Grps	28.00	72.00	100.00
Pearson Chi-square: 39.0418, df=2, p=.000000			

VI.6 Factors behind watching the reality shows.

Table 9: what make the viewers decide to watch reality shows?

	Number	Percentage (%)
Reality	24	24.00
Content	56	56.00
Contestants	20	20.00
Total	100	100.00

Among the total respondents a majority of 56 depend on the content of the programme for watching reality shows. 24 view the show depending on the reality of the show and the rest of the total, 20 depend on the contestants to decide whether to watch a reality show

Table 10: Viewers decision and educational qualification

Q21	Reality	Content	Contestants	Total
PhD	32.26	64.52	3.23	100.00
PG	21.28	68.09	10.64	100.00
Degree	18.18	18.18	63.64	100.00
All Grps	24.00	56.00	20.00	100.00
Pearson Chi-square: 35.9487, df=4, p=.00000				

Here the chi-square test was applied to analyse the viewer's decision to watch reality show on the basis of education. The 'p' value shows there exist a highly significant relation between these variables.

VI.7 Biggest problems find with reality shows

Table :11 Biggest problems find with reality shows

	Number	Percentage (%)
Fake reality factor	86	86.00
Overly dramatic	84	84.00
Building tensions	24	24.00
Contestants are ill-treated	35	36.00
Cooked-up emotions	74	74.00
Mimicking international shows	65	65.00

Respondents find fake reality factor (86%) and dramatic nature (84%) of reality shows as the biggest problems in viewing those shows. Cooked-up emotions (74%) were also considered as the factor with reality shows.65% of the respondents opined that the reality shows in Malayalam are mimicking the international shows.

VII.   Conclusion

For the past several years reality television has dominated mainstream television programming, providing relatively inexpensive entertainment. Many studies were undertaken in the field of reality shows in general and consumption, perception and satisfaction patterns of reality shows in particular. But not much has been done about the perception of young viewers of regional television towards the believability factor of reality shows. When particularly considering the fact that Kerala hosts a young generation who are the biggest critics of everything, with high level of literacy and cultural quotients, it is imperative to have a study about the behavior of the educated youth towards reality television. This study arrived at a conclusion that the youth of Kerala noticed many problems with the reality shows being broadcasted. They have the opinion that the reality factor is absent in such reality shows. Those shows were made overly dramatic with cooked up emotions. Educational qualification has significant relationship with the reality show perception among the television viewers of Kerala.

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